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Exercising Freedom

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G Ö Z E S A N E R

For today, more may depend on human freedom than ever before – on man's capacity to turn the scales which are heavily weighted in favour of disaster which always happens automatically and therefore always appears to be irresistible. No less than the continued existence of mankind on earth may depend this time upon man's gift to 'perform miracles', that is, to bring about the infinitely improbable and establish it as a reality.

Hannah Arendt (1960: 45)

Notwithstanding the alarm bells that accompany the use of the word 'man' as synonymous with human being, Arendt's observations above ring unexpectedly true today, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, limited by the dire necessity of staying alive on a global scale, all too aware of the seemingly insurmountable injustices it has brought into focus. This adherence to necessity, to the automatic unfolding of cause and effect, is the opposite of what Hannah Arendt conceives to be human freedom. For Arendt, freedom is the distinctly human capacity to 'break into the world wholly unexpected and unforeseen' (43) and to begin something new without full knowledge of or control over its consequences, but with the possibility of shifting the scales. And this very ability to interrupt what appears to be inescapable is as miraculous as it is commonplace.

The lonesome image of Greta Thunberg holding her banner on her first *Skolstrejk för Klimatet* (school strike for the climate) comes to mind. In the first instance, Thunberg's school strike is a personal action publicly made, a small-scale but visible deed. It purposefully breaks the school routine to bring about a more substantial break and, indeed, to create a world where school routines can last. Unbeknownst to Thunberg at the time, her singular act of resistance begins a movement of collective activism on a global scale, allowing her contemporaries not only to witness but also to partake in the performance

of freedom and its spectacular resonance. While organizers of a recent conference on theatre pedagogy might suggest, tongue-in-cheek, that it is unlikely for Thunberg 'to embark on a program of actor training' (Alexandrowicz and Fancy 2019), I beg to differ and I suspect Arendt would agree with me. Given her emphasis on freedom as public performance and her recognition of the affinity between politics and the theatre, Arendt would encourage critically engaged citizens to undertake performer training in order to develop precisely the skills to enact their freedom and to perform everyday miracles.

This article offers a close reading of Arendt's understanding of freedom and political action to propose a performer training utopia that identifies itself as a series of exercises of/for freedom. Steering clear of training models that are presented as 'freeing' a performer's body or voice (incisively criticized by Sjöström 2015), I focus my attention on solo performance and on the relationship between performer and spectators. How does one train as a solo performer to make an appearance in front of others in a way that brings about the experience of freedom for all? What skills does one need to publicly do something 'wholly unexpected and unforeseen'? The solo genre resonates with Arendt's description of freedom as an event, but it also brings up specific challenges – particularly with respect to the neoliberalist celebration of a different kind of individual freedom and its influences on solo performance as a paradigm. Touching briefly upon solo documentary performance and solo autobiographical performance to identify key dynamics regarding the performer's relationship with spectators, I turn my attention towards clowning. I investigate specific clown training practices (including examples of ensemble training that provide space for solo emergence, which I read as clown training techniques) and discuss how they

exercise – that is, rehearse, practise, educate, keep working – freedom in action.

F R E E D O M

Arendt takes issue with modern philosophical approaches that confine freedom to a mental process. Paradoxically, inner freedom is equated with doing whatever one wants, on the one hand, and with the very faculty with which one controls one's desires, on the other (Arendt 1961: 146–8). Actor training models that profess freedom often bear the same aporia: to become freer the actor is asked to control – to exercise sovereignty over – her automatic responses; yet this is all done in search of what is deemed to be a deeper and more authentic set of automatic responses (see Evans 2009: 154–61). Arendt's freedom hinges on a person's agency to take action; it requires the presence of others and a tangible shared world in which to act and to be perceived while doing so. Critiquing the solitary and apolitical nature of inner freedom, Arendt asserts the primacy of political freedom: 'We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves' (1961: 148).

Freedom and political action are inextricably linked. Setting the stage for the experience of freedom is the sole purpose of politics: 'The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action' (146). Arendt references the public sphere of the ancient city-state, *polis*, where citizens communicate who they are with words and deeds, as the political space par excellence. She distinguishes between the private realm (which includes the social), where negotiations around necessities, such as sustenance and its fair sharing, are made, from the political sphere where, unfettered by necessity, human beings can shape and change the world on a historical level. While Arendt has been criticized for overlooking the injustices of the *polis* – its use of slave labour and exclusion of women and foreigners – it serves as a model for an Arendtian understanding of politics that aims first and foremost 'to establish and keep in existence a space where freedom as virtuosity can appear' (Arendt 1960: 35).

Political action in this respect is a distinct

type of activity. Different from labour, which enslaves human beings in a constant cycle of production and consumption, and work, which has meaning insofar as its fruits are lasting and effective, action is an end-in-itself. It is not measured according to the extent to which it achieves an aim, but by its very existence, its performative virtuosity and its ability to resonate among its witnesses. Paul Voice uses the verbs 'individuating and disclosing' (2014: 89) to define it and Svetlana Boym refers to it as a theatrical adventure that is both a response to the world as it is and an invitation to cocreate or imagine a different world: 'The experience of freedom is akin to the theatrical performance that uses conventions, public memory, and a common stage but also allows for the possibility of the unprecedented and the particular' (2010: 4). Freedom takes place as a heroic political action unfolds, performatively and spontaneously, in front of others. It reveals something about the world and provokes a response.

Returning to Thunberg, it might be argued that her school strike falls under the category of work as opposed to action as it states a very clear environmentalist aim. In fact, Thunberg might argue that the school strike is entirely instrumental and worthless unless it manages to change policy. Yet, regardless of how effectively Thunberg sets in motion a reversal of environmental damage, her action can be recognized and indeed celebrated as an experience of freedom in the Arendtian sense. Voice writes that a key quality of political action as theatrical freedom is the ability to create deliberative processes, to engage communities in debate, to practise persuasion, argumentation and negotiation, and to cultivate a participatory democracy that allows for 'messy dialogue' (2014: 94). An individual discloses herself – in this case, Thunberg shares her panic at the end of the world and her rage that adults in charge are not acting upon the scientific information – and ripples of conversations and actions are triggered. It is not only those who take to the streets or join the school strike who exercise their freedom in this case; it is also all others who witness the performance of a child illuminated on a global scale. A shared space emerges around her action; those who witness it become part of the same

space, the same (doomed) globe.

The theatrical performance of political action has a unique way of creating space, even where no such public realm exists. This is due to the inherent relationality of political action, as Arendt explains: 'Action ... no matter what its specific content, always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open limitations and cut across all boundaries' (1958: 190). In her Arendtian analysis of the artistic practices of the Umbrella movement during widespread protests in Hong Kong, Laikwan Pang focuses on their ability 'to transform non-places into social and political spaces' (2016: 158). This capacity to create space goes in tandem with a capacity to transform an anonymous mass into a public. In the throes of a totalitarian and/or neoliberal establishment that co-opts anti-establishment actions, the event of freedom creates relationships between actors and spectators, and among the spectators themselves, and thus changes the faceless multitude into many singularities, at the same time and place, witnessing the unfolding of the same action.

Thunberg's action also creates its own stage and audience; furthermore, it projects into the future. While it might appear that it is Thunberg who is exercising her freedom, her immediate and future witnesses partake in the event of freedom as much as, if not more than, the doer herself. Freedom in action is never fully accessible to the one who performs it, but 'reveals itself fully only to the storyteller, that is, to the backward glance of the historian' (Arendt 1958: 192). For Arendt, the self-revelatory quality of action, 'its implicit manifestation of the agent and the speaker' (187) and its virtuosic embodiment of an 'inspiring principle' (1961: 33) require others to take note and to understand. While the agent's willingness to take action may be how freedom begins, it nevertheless continues more strongly in the witnesses who are able to see the full picture.

SOLO PERFORMANCE

Arendt's elaboration on the spectator's experience of freedom resonates with utopian readings of solo performance. Jill Dolan's coinage of the utopian performative draws specifically on this genre's unique ability to bring about

a collective experience. Citing the multi-character work of Anna Deavere Smith and focusing on the intersubjectivity of spectatorship, Dolan observes how one performer embodying many characters invites spectators to partake in a sense of hope. The solo performer models a practice of occupying the shoes of another, provoking spectators to take a flight of the imagination towards the possibility of political dialogue across differences (2002). She becomes a vehicle for spectators to envision themselves speaking the words of others in their own names and to acknowledge the arbitrariness of such differences, that their lives could have indeed turned out differently.

Solo performance can thus bring about a tangible experience of plurality. Yet it can also solicit an affirmation of singularity, specifically in the case of marginalized identities that make space for themselves in solo autobiographical performance. José Esteban Muñoz begins *Disidentifications* with the image of Marga Gomez, whose solo performance, he observes, 'permits the spectator, often a queer who has been locked out of the halls of representation or rendered a static caricature there, to imagine a world where queer lives, politics, and possibilities are representable in their complexity' (1999: 1). In this example, solo performance becomes a vehicle for non-heteronormative stories to resist the hegemonic discourse. But the resistance echoes beyond the performer. The solo act invites the many spectators to say, 'Me too!'; it ceases to belong solely to the person performing but by virtue of the fact that it is public, incites a collective sense of agency.

Resonating with Muñoz's reading of Gomez, one of Pang's case studies involves 'the transmutation of a solo dance to a collective dance' (2016: 168). Renowned dancer Mui Cheuk-yin offers the basic steps and overall shape of her solo piece *Eulogy*, which uses an umbrella as a partner for the dancer, as a starting point for 'Umbrella Dance', inviting others to collectively occupy a form she has created in solitude. While the open-endedness, unpredictability, natality and plurality of this shift from the solo *Eulogy* to the ensemble 'Umbrella Dance' resonate strongly with Arendt, for Pang it is the active attention of watching that brings about the experience

of freedom for all. This time, paradoxically, the occupants are transformed 'from political actors into artistic spectators ... given the chance to see themselves as players on this historical stage, realigning seeing and acting and also transcending their own political position' (168).

While its 'relative low cost, accessibility unfettered by industry gatekeepers, and willingness to treat the personal as the political' renders solo performance 'of particular significance to marginalised communities', Stephen Greer is sceptical that the form is 'inherently or unreservedly empowering for politicised subjects' (2019: 6–7). Foregrounding autobiography, as Greer critically articulates, also materializes the neoliberal ideal of freedom in the figure of the individual entrepreneur. Lazlo Pearlman also problematizes the notions of authenticity and self-revelation that permeate the discourse on solo, and critiques 'expectations and requirements of autobiographical "truth-telling" in identity-based theatre' (2015: 88). Offering a Foucauldian approach, he identifies how the revelation of one's 'truth' operates as a form of coercion, rehearsing an internalized disciplinary voice under the guise of liberation. He proposes 'to queer the machinery of confession' using 'dissemblage', a method of decentering truth, and an alternative to truth-worship (89).

While solo autobiographical performance co-opted by the pervasive neoliberalist agenda can veer towards problematic self-narratives, it is important to note that Arendt's political agent is not in charge of what they reveal. On the contrary, 'nobody knows whom he reveals when he discloses himself in deed or word' but 'must be willing to risk the disclosure' (1958: 180). Save for the fact that they respond to the world in a way that is there for all to see, save for that momentary display of courage that makes them step into the public square, the hero is not heroic at all (186).

The significance and risk attached to simply taking action publicly and revealing oneself is evident in Thunberg's case. As a child, she is conventionally excluded from the political sphere, which aligns her more closely with Arendtian freedom. Analysing Arendt's writings on Socrates (Arendt and Kohn 2005) and *Billy Budd* (Arendt 1963, 1969), the eponymous hero of Melville's

novella *Billy Budd, Sailor* (1967), Munia Bhaumik traces a recurrent staging of the non-citizen as a way of emphasizing the significance of the witnesses to the event of freedom. 'Her frequent recuperation of the speechless hero posits an ethics of reading for the imperceptible as an obligation of democratic life' (2015: 29). Bhaumik argues that Arendt focuses on these cast-away heroes in order to underline the value of plurality as opposed to singularity and to critique regimes that work towards readily accepted and roughly copy-pasted opinions. Arendt thus casts the 'figure of an ethical witness who questions rather than consents' (28) and she 'insist[s] upon the spectator's obligations to the silenced figure' (27). Returning to the example of solo autobiographical performance by representatives of marginalized communities, it follows that the spectators' engagement and experience of the performative event as a celebration of difference assigns them an ethical responsibility to carry outside the theatre. This reciprocation is more significant than the truth (or not) of what is revealed by the performer.

CLOWN

The figure of the speechless hero as silenced other resonates strongly with clown. Clown origin stories in recent publications are rife with images of misfits: Nalle Laanela describes everyone laughing while he is 'trying to be serious about being a dancer' (Laanela and Sacks 2015: 6) and David Carlyon recounts trading basic army training (as a conscientious objector) with Clown College (2016: 3). In both examples, the authors one day discover that what they do is clowning and decide to embrace this path. While clown training manuals, practitioners' interviews and writings, and scholarly research share a tendency to talk about the clown as a type of being qualified by adjectives such as 'innocent', 'mischievous' or 'failure-prone', as clown and pedagogue Avner Eisenberg explains, clown is 'a verb ... There's no such thing as *a clown*. There's only *to clown*' (quoted in LeBank and Bridel 2015: 64). Like Arendt's freedom, clowning is emergent and intricately connected to public action.

What actions constitute clowning? For Eisenberg (2016), to clown means to come

across interesting problems and solve them in interesting ways. The emphasis here is not on the content (so the problem or solution is not necessarily interesting in isolation) but on the attitude: to clown means to encounter the world with fascination and a sense of novelty. This resonates strongly with the notion of natality that Arendt identifies as a key aspect of freedom. Human beings begin things and take actions that set in motion events that cannot be contained. Human beings shift perspectives and invent possibilities, enacting 'the freedom to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, not even as an object of cognition or imagination, and which therefore strictly speaking could not be known' (Arendt 1961: 32). A clown's adventures in the world bring about newness and unpredictability, as well as a commitment to accepting and playing with unknowable consequences.

In *Core Training for the Relational Actor*, Alison Hodge shares an exercise she calls 'Re-configuring the Body'. Albeit not a clown exercise in its original context, this practice invites performers (including myself) to 'play with the space between their body and a vertical stick' in recognition of the fact that we 'approach "things" within our immediate environment not as fixed, known objects but as entities to be discovered through contact' (Hodge 2013: 35, 34; see also the DVD section titled 'With Things'). It is impossible to receive impulses from an inanimate immobile object, yet playing with the space in between, the performer discovers a sense of relationality. In each encounter, the weight, volume, shape, temperature and texture of the stick are met anew. And when the performer begins to play with the movement patterns inherent to the stick, submitting to or resisting its tendency to crash and fall or its unbending shape, a clown attitude emerges. A common object like a stick (or an umbrella) becomes an interlocutor, a co-creator and an opportunity to conjure a new world, capturing a trace of the natality inherent in Arendtian freedom.

Positing clown training as a type of critical pedagogy after Freire, Laurel Butler also talks of 're-approaching reality' (2012: 70). Her pedagogic practice is rooted in the idea that anybody can be

trained to come upon the everyday as if it were new. She works with walking, gradually drawing students' attention to different elements of this pedestrian movement to find estrangement and novelty, what I would see as a kind of Brechtian *verfremdung*. While I am critical of the essentializing discourse on finding one's clown or becoming clown as if it exists as a new other person *within* oneself, I agree that clown exercises share an ability to bring about a shift in perspective. Both the encounter with the stick and the work on walking cultivate a willingness and joy in the performer to look for other ways of doing things and to actively enact a 'clown' logic.

It is politically significant that this search is carried out in solidarity with others. Clowning, like the improvisatory performance of freedom, shares the actor's spontaneous process with spectators and this synchronicity is precisely what brings about the experience of freedom for all. Another response to the accusation that Arendt engages in hero-worship is to point out her emphasis that the political actor, like the clown, does not know how everything will pan out. While all artistic creativity has an element of surprise, Arendt notes that the creative process, what she sees as the truly free period of virtuosity in the arts, is mostly hidden from the public (1961: 34). Performative forms such as clown, on the other hand, hinge specifically on the transparency, humility and spontaneity of the actor, who is not a hero ready to impress the audience with their virtue, but rather one of those spectators who cannot help but take action and face the consequences.

While definitions of clown as the revelation of an inner authentic self might profess some affinity with the self-revelatory aspect of Arendtian freedom, the training process leading up to finding 'one's clown' cannot be assumed as liberating. Echoing Pearlman's critique of truth-telling in solo performance, Purcell Gates identifies a tension between the discourse of authenticity that underlies the French clown training tradition and the kind of subjectivity that arrives in the training: an in-between-self as opposed to a very-much-itself-self. Purcell Gates, like Pearlman, shows how pervasive the notion of an inner authentic self can be: 'students nevertheless tended to link the idea of

successfully following an impulse on stage in the midst of disorientation with being in touch with the “self” (2011:237).

Paradoxically, Purcell Gates suggests, what appears to come from within indeed comes from without, from the clown’s relationship with the world and others. What emerges is ‘a self that was negotiated externally, in the space between the performer and spectator, as the performer’s body signified a self that caused the spectator to respond with laughter, even as the performer was unaware of this communication’ (241). Purcell Gates’s conclusion echoes Arendt’s assertion that political action (and the event of freedom) is available to spectators who are able to see the full image, rather than the political actors themselves.

It is not surprising, then, that Eisenberg (2016) begins his clown pedagogy by working on the space between persons using the breath. The breath marks the relationality of clowning in two ways: first, it is a tangible expression of the clown’s relationship with the audience. Alison Hodge observes that ‘breath is intricately bound to feeling – it can suppress or release feelings in equal measure’ (2013:32). This somatic aspect of the breath can be shared physically between an actor and spectators, affording a materiality to the experience of being ‘*with* neither for nor against others’ (Arendt 1958:180). The clown walks in, gasps and holds their breath and the audience follows suit; they reciprocate the performer’s breath and the implicit feeling. Eisenberg (2016) refers to this moment as the terror that the clown and the spectators share: ‘is it going to be awful?’ The moment the performer relaxes and exhales, so does the audience. Fear is overcome and a willingness to play takes hold. Courage, the primary virtue of the clown and the Arendtian actor, is enacted.

For Eisenberg too, it is fundamental that the clown’s process of coming upon and solving problems is shared with spectators. Indeed, to clown is to submit to a wholly relational existence in an unpredictable world, where ‘every action is either a reaction to something else or so that something else can be done’ (2016). In his workshop *Making the Audience Feel Things: A discourse on clowning*, Eisenberg works with a participant through the impossible (and

imaginary) task of keeping a valuable paper bag dry while putting on a raincoat and opening an umbrella in a downpour. In their first attempt, the performer does a great job of acrobatically indicating how they would achieve this feat. Yet what Eisenberg is after is something much simpler and yet much more challenging: to do one thing at a time, always sharing with the audience and keeping the cause or the aim of each action transparent. It doesn’t matter if the solutions are ingenious; the aim here is to create a shared space where they occur to the performer at the same time as they occur to the spectators.

Working with the breath sustains the connection with the spectators and enables the actor to stay in this wholly relational, wholly processual mode of being where they do one thing at a time, always *with* the spectators. Every action is accompanied by a breath, an inhale or an exhale. Whether the actor playfully interrupts and punctuates the automatic flow of breath or they observe and allow its pattern, following the breath in this way brings the actor and the spectators somatically to the same time and space, creates an affinity with unpredictability and encourages everyone to note (and play with) what is and isn’t controllable.

The co-existence of performer and spectator extends beyond the visceral into the ethical, and indeed the political. For Arendt, it is crucial for the one taking action to understand the values of a community and find a sense of togetherness ‘*with* others and neither for nor against them’ (1958:180). A political action embodies a shared, recognizable virtue, in a way that can be seen and identified by everyone. The Arendtian actor performs in a way that is crystal clear and visible; it calls others to attention and brings otherwise unconnected individuals into a shared experience with its ‘shining brightness we once called glory’ (ibid.). The red nose (often read as a liberating agent in the process of becoming clown) operates as a marker of shared space. In a relational reading of clown, the nose does not so much permit the actor to become someone else, but shines a light on the stage, invites the spectators to partake in the spectacle, and connotes with its ‘shining brightness’ that something different is happening. Taking the stage this way requires an acute awareness of the audience, an embodied

expressivity of clear and transparent actions and communicative skills to generate deliberative processes, further words and deeds.

Eisenberg explains how the virtuosity of clown is different from the virtuosity of any other circus performer precisely due to this in-betweenness. He traces the red nose to the sign of drunkenness and loss of inhibition, yet rather than essentializing how it affects the performer, he discusses how it functions as a psychological mediator that ensures an emotional connectivity between the spectators and what they are witnessing. Co-feeling is at the core here: Eisenberg tells the story of an average person who walks onto the circus arena and jumps on a horse or climbs the tightrope. Just as the Arendtian actor demonstrates courage and spontaneity, a 'willingness to act and speak at all' (186), so does this 'Uncle Louis' who shows courage to break into the circle and yet acts as 'one of us ... an intermediary between the virtuosos of the circus and the ordinary human beings' (Eisenberg 2016). The nose's permissiveness extends (an invitation) from the performer to the spectators.

EXERCISING FREEDOM

The discussion above returns repeatedly to the relationality of the clown/the Arendtian actor, which places them alongside and among their spectators. The event of freedom is emergent through this togetherness; it is not the person who is free, courageous or glorious who takes action, but rather the one who takes action performs and embodies these characteristics. Following this logic, it should come as no surprise that exercising freedom is not a solo endeavour but an ensemble practice. In conclusion, I wish to put forth a specific ensemble exercise that echoes an Arendtian political model by placing the individual actor in front of a group of active spectators, as an exercise for/of freedom implicitly bringing about the emergence of clowns and political actors. The example I will discuss can be placed among other similar practices, such as Iben Nagel Rasmussen's 'Wind Dance' (Magnat 2013: 108–10) and the Viewpoints' 'Lane Work' (Bogart and Landau 2005: 68–70). These share a simple format: they use a set of constraints and

instructions to first establish an ensemble, and then allow a soloist to step out and engage in a call and response with the others before joining them again. Performers take turns to be this separate individual and the work is wrapped up when everyone has had a chance.

In this exercise I will call 'Counter-rhythm', participants form a circle facing one another, while stepping in and out and breathing together at a common tempo-rhythm. (This specific form has not been documented but it is a continuation and variation of 'Tempo-Rhythm' and 'Polyphonic Attention' in Hodge 2007, 2013.) The tempo-rhythm is most commonly a 4/4 beat, with the right or the left foot moving in and out of the circle while the other foot steps in place, and a vocal emphasis on 1 accompanied by a step into the circle and a jubilant, 'Huh!' The ensemble discovers, negotiates and works to keep the rhythm together by mediating between individual tendencies to speed up or slow down. It gets boring, tiring, dull, exhausting, confusing and even oppressive. The group continues. The participants keep meeting one another on the beat, with eyes, bodies and voices working to synchronize and to observe. Keeping a steady beat going itself becomes a playful effort – one where participants have to consider giving and receiving energy or impulses through the breath and the movement.

Although the task of establishing and sustaining a shared rhythm is a political challenge in itself, the crux of the exercise happens when an individual performer steps into the middle and makes an appearance. Continuing the action of stepping but allowing it to permeate the whole body, all the while listening to the continuous rhythmic drone of the circle, the soloist in the middle begins to play. They move, dance, alter the shape and tempo-rhythm of the breathing and the stepping as they gradually embody a counter-rhythm in the feet and the breath, a little melodic overlay on top of the steadiness of the beat. If the tempo-rhythm of the circle is a 4/4 with an emphasis on the 1, the soloist in the middle can play with 2/4 or 8/8, 3/4 or 9/8, place the emphasis off-beat or combine different beats. They can speed up, slow down, drag certain beats and rush through others. They can move back and forth between fitting the circle's tempo-rhythm

and offering a counter-rhythm; indeed, they can go fully into an arrhythmic territory. They can actively confuse or put off the circle; however, an antagonistic relationship with the circle often results in short-lived experiments that degenerate and break the jointly created space and finish the exercise for all.

The performer in the middle continues to move as they listen and respond: there is no separate space to settle upon a solo rhythm – rather it emerges in dialogue between the individual performer in the middle and the ensemble circle. As the soloist listens and begins to differ, the collaborative effort to maintain a creative tension and a dialogic relationship brings about an experience of novelty and fascination for all. The interaction with the soloist in turn animates the circle: the ensemble has a reason to sustain the steady tempo-rhythm, as the more certain the beat, the more power and resource it gives the soloist to play. The circle creates a trampoline for the one in the middle with the quality of their attention, breathing and stepping; as active spectators they will the person in the middle to perform something incredible, virtuosic and miraculous. The overall shape of the practice thus echoes Arendt's description of freedom; it brings about a disruption of the habitual with the appearance of something unexpected and cultivates an affinity with and a pleasure of the kinds of qualities that constitute Arendt's freedom as virtuosity: courage, natality, spontaneity, responsiveness, visibility and willingness to make an appearance.

This article proposed clown training as an exercise of/for freedom and put forth an understanding of clown as a relational, unpredictable, uncontainable and novel way of acting relationally and spontaneously. There are fascinating examples of clowns in activist performance, such as the work of Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA), which I haven't considered here. Instead, I analysed Arendtian freedom in order to extract specific qualities that can be nurtured in performer training, specifically clown training. The utopia here is that clown training can prepare the performer to take action and exercise their freedom inside and outside the theatre, as an

active citizen in the public space, in ways that may or may not be overtly political. Clown training can equip the performer with the skills to make their appearance and respond to the world in unexpected ways, thereby revealing something about the world.

Furthermore, ensemble practices that create a space for solo emergence can be understood as exercises for/of freedom, as they invite participants to create a shared space in which individuals can experiment with action, difference, separating themselves from others and beginning something new. Embedded in such ensemble activities is a unique sense of collaboration in search of moments of exquisite particularity within a structure of repetition, comparable to what Arendt might see as the everyday miracle of freedom. Moving away from paradigms of 'clown as inner self' towards clown as a mode of relationality, the training utopia proposed here educates a sense of ease with being *with* others and the courage to be different *from* others. Arendtian freedom rests on an image of a co-created world in which political action is possible for all.

When Arendt states 'theatre is the political art par excellence; only there is the political sphere of human life transposed into art' (1958: 188), she points out how the relational, self-revelatory and impromptu nature of human action is present in the theatre. The practices discussed above capture the ebb and flow of a utopian active political life where one goes back and forth between being one of many, who create the space by the quality of their attention and their responsiveness/responsibility as witnesses, and being the one who steps out and in and exercises their freedom. Verbs Arendt uses to describe freedom, such as 'disclosing one's self without ever either knowing [oneself] or being able to calculate beforehand what [one] reveals' (192), 'inserting [oneself] into the human world through action and speech' (184), 'express[ing] this distinction and distinguish[ing] [one]self' (176) and 'begin[n]g a story of one's own' (186), are stage directions or instructions for this improvisation. They are also invitations to experience and express oneself in a singular act, with full awareness that, as Rebecca Schneider puts it, 'the successful solo is no solo at all', but always already 'a map of

citations and a subjectivity so multiply connected as to be collective' (2005: 38, 36). We are all Greta Thunbergs after all, waiting for our turn to step into the circle. Had Thunberg not taken action and gone on strike, someone else would have done something else equally as powerful. Another clown, displaying 'a combination of play and duty, an obligation and a potential for creative civic action' (Boym 2010: 13–14) would have emerged.

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